



# Meditation In Theravada And Zen

**BHIKKHU  
ANANDA**



**MEDITATION  
IN  
THERAVADA  
AND ZEN**

**BHIKKHU ANANDA**

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**“THE GIFT OF TRUTH EXCELS ALL  
OTHER GIFTS”  
(Sabba Dānaṃ Dhamma Dānaṃ Jināti)**

*This book  
“Meditation in Theravada and Zen  
is sponsored*

*by  
Mr. Koh Yan Heong  
in loving memory of  
his late father and late uncles.*

*May the merits that accrue from this  
Gift of Truth ensure them  
a happy and blissful state in their next birth.*

*May the blessings and the high merit  
accruing from the sponsorship of this,  
bring about health, prosperity and happiness to  
Mr. Koh Yan Heong*

*Ven. Weragoda Sarada Nayaka Maha Thero  
08. 08. 2008*



## A WORD

**“SABBA DĀNAM DHAMMA DĀNAM JINĀTI  
SABBAṀ RASAṀ DHAMMARASO JINĀTI  
SABBAṀ RATIṀ DHAMMA RATĪ JINĀTI  
TAṆHAKKHAYO SABBADUKKHAṀ JINĀTI”**

“The gift of Truth excels all other gifts. The flavour of Truth excels all other flavours. The pleasure in Truth excels all other pleasures. He who has destroyed craving overcomes all sorrow”  
(Dhammapada 354)

Three kinds of gifts are mentioned in Buddhism, namely:-  
**ĀMISA DĀNA** (The gift of material things) **ABHAYA DĀNA** (The gift of life) and thirdly the **DHAMMA DĀNA** (The gift of Truth).

**ĀMISA DĀNA**:- or the gift of material things is practiced by people of all religions and is very common. Food, clothes and houses are given to people of little means or to refugees through various religious and social organizations. It is, no doubt, a good thing to satisfy the hunger of the starved and the thirst of the thirsty. This type of donations is highly recommended in Buddhism and is called the **ĀMISA DĀNA**. (The donations of material things).

Next comes the **ABHAYA DĀNA**, or giving life to those who are in danger of life caused by fire, water or enemies. Sometimes we hear of people who are about to die due to lack of blood. To donate blood and save another human life is indeed a

great thing. Donation of eyes and kidneys is also highly appreciated and they come under **ABHAYA DĀNA** – donation of life.

The last one the **DHAMMA DĀNA** or the gift of Truth or the doctrine is said to be the highest of all donations on earth.

The gift of Truth means – to teach and explain the doctrine to the people, to deviate them from the wrong path and lead them on the right path, to introduce what is moral and immoral, to organize discussions and seminars on the DHAMMA, to write and print books already written and to establish reading centers for the long standing of the Buddha's words.

One may provide all the disciples of the Buddha with the four requisites in the best possible way or give the people all material things. But to enlighten them on the DHAMMA with a stanza of only 4 lines is said to be the best and the highest of all other donations. Rare are the people who can preach and enlighten the listeners and convince them. Hence, the books written on the dhamma plays a very important role in the spread of DHAMMA.

Today the books written on Buddhism are not freely available to the readers. They are priced so high that it is beyond our means to obtain a couple of books. To obliterate this difficulty, our society has undertaken to print the books written by well known great scholars on Buddhism. We have already printed about three hundred books. Most of these books were printed to commemorate their near and dear dead ones.

These books will be freely available to those who are interested in Buddhism.

The most common custom of the day regarding the dead is to relic the ashes and build monuments or to give alms on behalf

of the dead to the monks or to charitable organizations. As mentioned early, these become secondary to the gift of the doctrine or Truth.

If anybody wishes to respect the dead by imparting the knowledge of the Truth, we would like to extend our co-operation. We have already selected some valuable books to be printed. Those who are interested on getting them printed with a photograph of the dead can contact the Religious Advices of The Singapore Buddhist Meditation Centre.

Further inquiries are welcome.

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**T**HERAVADA AS PRACTISED in the southern countries such as Ceylon, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos is known as early Buddhism, in contrast to Zen, a later development, which originated in China, and was later introduced to Japan, where it has gained strength not only in volume but in content.

Theravada Buddhists believe that they, and they only, preserve the original message of the Master in its pristine purity, whereas, the Zen School believes that they have captured the original and early spirit of Buddhism. It is no doubt true, that in Theravada countries, too much scholarly attention is paid to the doctrinal aspect in Buddhism, that may lead one to think, that emphasis is laid on the letter than in the spirit. However, the result is, that the Theravadins are apt to think that Zen Buddhism is something alien and foreign to the main current of Buddhist thought. The main charge levelled at Zen is, that it deviates too far from what is popularly understood to be the teaching of the Buddha, as recorded in the **Nikāyas**. The truth of these criticisms can be decided only by way of a careful and comparative study of both, Theravada and Zen.

Superficially indeed, Zen may seem so different to the Theravadin that he may dogmatically assert that Zen is not Buddhism. One cannot blame a Theravadin for all that he sees and criticizes in Zen, for he is brought up in an entirely different atmosphere. There are some things in Zen so bizarre, as to scare



and frighten the pious literary followers of early Buddhism and make them feel and declare that whatever Zen might be, it is not Buddhism. For instance, in the records of Zen, we may come across an earnest pupil monk who wishing to know the truth, would seek the help of his Zen master and ask, "Who is the Buddha?". The Zen master rather bluntly replies, "The cat climbs the post". Bewildered and confused at the master's reply, the pupil monk confesses his inability to grasp the meaning, to which, the Zen master says again: "If you don't ask the post". To the Theravadin, it would naturally occur as it may have been to the Zen novice, what has the cat's climbing the post or, the post by itself to do with the Buddha. Such replies, which seem to have no bearing on the question, would scare the Theravada Buddhist. To the Theravadin, the answer would seem nonsensical. To take another example, it is said of one Chinese Zen Master, Tan-hsia (Tanka Ten-nen) that one winter morning, he took the wooden statue of the Buddha down from its altar and burnt it, to warm himself. Such an act, would tantamount to sacrilegiousness from the point of view of the Theravadin. But, this is only the superficial aspect of Zen. As in everything else, and the most particularly in Zen, all its outward manifestations or demonstrations must not be regarded as final.

If we wish to understand Buddhism thoroughly, whether it be Theravada or Zen, we must dive deep into its depths to see where lies the core and the essence. What then, is Theravada and what is Zen? Wherein do lie the similarities and where do they meet?

To begin with, let us examine in brief what Theravada is.

Theravada or early Buddhism, preached by the Buddha Gautama, soon after His enlightenment, some 2500 years ago, teaches a way of deliverance or salvation to suffering humanity.

Life indeed, as we worldlings live it, is full of suffering. At times, fleeting material pleasures blind us momentarily to this great fact. Clouded and veiled by ignorance (**Avidyā**), it is but natural for one who does not see things as they truly are, to be fascinated by beautiful forms, melodious sounds, fragrant odours, delicious and sweet tastes, and soft contacts and count on them as happiness. However, on careful examination, we shall see that there is no lasting and enduring happiness, either in material comforts or in the pleasures of the sense. We take the unreal to be the real and try to cling to it. This is due to our ignorance. In reality, all that, we worldlings take as happiness, are but preludes to pain and sorrow, for when we no longer have them there is discontentment; and so insatiate are human desires that the more one gets the more one wants.

Hence, we are always living in a world, full of desires which we cannot obtain and as a result live a life of sorrow and pain. But, the Buddha, who with his Buddha wisdom, saw that everything was sorrow-fraught said: The world rests on sorrow (**Dukkhe loko paṭiṭṭhito**). All living beings (human or animal) are subject to the ever present danger of pain and suffering without exception. To us, enmeshed in **samsāra** there are no guaranteed conditions of happiness, peace or security. At any hour or any moment, we are likely to become victims.

The Buddha however did not merely preach that everything is sorrow. Had he stopped at that, he would have been a pessimist, but on the contrary his message is the boldest optimism ever proclaimed to the world. Having attained Supreme Enlightenment, out of compassion, he showed erring humanity a way out of sorrow. In the **Majjhima Nikāya**, the Buddha is quoted as saying: “Oh monks, one thing do I teach, that is suffering and the cessation of suffering”.

The Four Noble Truths, preached by the Buddha, contain the essence of His teaching and the last or the fourth Truth, which is the Noble Truth of the Path Leading to the Cessation of Sorrow, contains the Noble Eight-fold Path (**ariya aṭṭaṅgika magga**) which leads the disciple to Peace, to Nirvana, to the final stage of sainthood. This Noble Eight-fold Path has its three rungs – Morality (**sīla**), Mental training (**samādhi**) and Wisdom (**paññā**).

Of these three stages, morality constitutes the foundation, without which, no real progress along the path to purity and deliverance is possible. It is only a means to an end, but not the end in itself. It is only the first stage on the path of purity. Here the disciple, disciplines himself and his mental faculties, which are yet too immature to appreciate the abstract truth. It is from the gymnasium of **Sīla**, that the mind emerges to wrestle with and triumph over its foes in the samsaric battle. But more important that **Sīla**, is **Samādhi** and **Paññā**. These two higher stages are brought to perfection by meditation. Disciplined by **Sīla**, the disciple is fit to develop concentration. The purpose of the **Samādhi** exercises is, to reach the unshakable tranquility and purity of mind, which is the foundation of Insight, leading to deliverance from the cycle of rebirth and misery. Combined with **Samādhi**, Wisdom or **Paññā** is the sharp instrument by which, he totally cuts off the very roots of all fetters that bind him to this ceaseless wandering of birth, of life and death.

Through his trained power of one-pointed thought, the seeker of truth views the whole world as transitory, painladen and egoless. Taking one of these characteristics as a subject of mediation, he develops **Samādhi** in the same manner, until one day, for the first time, he gains insight into the world he clung to, for so long. Longing for deliverance, he continues the practice, till by the might of his concentration and sincerity of purpose, he bursts

through the shackles of **Avidyā** and gains a first glimpse of the hypercosmic **Nibbāna**, thus attaining the first stage of Sainthood (**Sotāpanna**). With added vigour, and more endeavour, he gains clearer visions and gradually attains the second and third stages, namely **Sakadāgāmi** and **Anāgāmi**, and finally the last stage of sainthood or Perfect Holiness. It is in this state, that one sees **Nibbāna** face to face and enjoys its supreme Bliss.

This Path is open to all, monks and laymen, but each one must make the exertion himself – the goal to be attained here and now.

Put in a nutshell, Theravada Buddhism is:

“To do good,  
To shun evil,  
To purify the mind,  
This is the teaching of Buddhas.”

And now to come to Zen, What is Zen?

Zen claims that it transmit the essence of Buddhism and not its formulated articles of faith as are recorded in the Suttas. Zen is the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese “ch’an,” the Sanskrit equivalent of which is ‘**dhyāna**’. Zen is one of the Mahayana schools of Buddhism, shorn of its Indian garb. It has had its development in the Far East, and has a history of about a thousand years. As far as its doctrinal side is concerned, Zen has nothing particularly to offer as its own, for its *raison d’etre* consists in its being a spiritual experience and not in being a special system of philosophy.

The basis of Zen is traced back to the supreme Enlightenment attained by the Buddha, while He was sitting under the Bodhi tree at **Gayā**, some 2500 years ago. Traditionally, as



believed by its followers, Zen is considered to have been transmitted by the Buddha to His foremost disciple, Venerable **Mahā Kassapa**, when the Buddha held out a bunch of flowers to His congregation, the meaning of which was at once grasped by **Mahā Kassapa**, who quietly smiled at him.

Tradition also tells us that from Venerable **Mahā Kassapa**, Zen was handed over to the 28<sup>th</sup> patriarch, Bodhidharma, who became the first patriarch of Zen, in China. Therefore, the actual history of Zen dates with the coming of Bodhidharma to China in 520 A.D. Zen, as it is found today, is in the opinion of most scholars, the product of the Chinese mind or the Chinese elaboration of the doctrine of Enlightenment.

Zen, in its essence, is the art of seeing into the nature of one's own being and it points the way from bondage to freedom. Zen is a way of training, in which the mind is always well controlled, so as not to lose sight of oneself, in one's daily life. Zen is, however, by no means knowledge, but a personal experience or an attainment through experience. The very nature of Zen is that it evades all definition and explanation. The Zen masters declare it as "*a special transmission outside the orthodox teachings*." The mind of us worldlings, is ordinarily chock-full of this, that, and the other, which draws our attention and which, may be useful in their own ways in our daily life. But, it is because of these accumulations, that we are made to be miserable and groan under the feeling of bondage. Each time we try to keep our minds free from them, they fetter us, they choke us, and cast a heavy veil over our spiritual horizon.

Zen therefore wants to open in man a "third eye" or the "Prajna eye", as Theravadins will call it, to the undreamed of regions shut away from us, through our own ignorance. When the cloud of ignorance disappears, we begin to see things as they truly are, and for the first time, we see into the true nature of our own being. It is

then, that we come to know the significance of life. We come to know what is ultimate. Henceforth, it is no blind striving and there comes to us a feeling that makes us infinitely blessed. As the central fact, of Zen Buddhism, lies the attainment of Satori (*Wu* in Chinese) or the Opening of the Spiritual Eye. There is no Zen without Satori. It is the end and be-all of Zen.

As Satori strikes at the primary fact of existence, its attainment marks a turning point in one's life. In Zen, every contrivance (**upaya**) disciplinary or doctrinal, is directed towards the attainment of this Satori. Hence it is no pastime but the most serious task in life, where, one has to put his entire life and soul into it. Zen Buddhism is no place for idlers. The methods used by the Zen masters to indicate the path to the disciples are uncommon, unconventional and illogical and consequently incomprehensible to the uninitiated. These methods can generally be classified under Verbal and Direct. While the verbal method has about 6 subdivisions, the Direct method means a display of physical force and may be subdivided into several groups such as gestures, striking, and performance of a definite set of acts. The principle underlying these various methods, is to awaken a certain sense in the pupil's own consciousness by means of which, he intuitively grasps the truth of Zen. Although in Zen, Satori is an abrupt experience, it has a well marked graduation in its progress towards this ultimate goal.

To obtain Satori, all things which crowd our daily life consciousness must be wiped clear. In our ordinary life, consciousness is kept too busy with everything, so much so, that it has no time to reflect on itself. Consciousness has, so to say, no opportunity to become conscious of itself. It is so deeply involved in action, it is in fact, action itself. Satori never takes place as long as consciousness is kept focused outwardly as it were. Satori is born of self-consciousness. Consciousness must be made to look within itself before it is awakened to Satori. And to deserve the



name Satori, the mental revolution must be so complete as to make one really and sincerely feel, that there took place a radical change. The intensity of this feeling is proportional to the amount of effort the attainer of Satori has put into the achievement. For it is said, that there is, a gradation in Satori, as to its intensity, as in all our mental activity. However, the possession of a lukewarm Satori may have no such spiritual revolution, as in Rinzai or Dogen Zenji.

Just as water freezes suddenly in a given temperature and the hitherto liquid turns into solid, Satori comes upon one unawares, after an exhaustive course of Zazen. It is said, that on attaining Satori, one feels, that one has exhausted one's whole being. It is the sudden flashening of a new Truth altogether undreamed of. With Satori, our entire surroundings are viewed from a different angle of perception. It is no more the old way of looking at things and the old world it used to be. Satori is the most intimate individual experience and therefore cannot be expressed in words or described in any manner.

The attainment of Satori is the culmination and goal of Zen. Whereas, ordinary life is in bondage, Satori is the first step to liberation.

Zen Buddhism, put in a nutshell is:

“A special transmission outside the scriptures,  
No dependence upon words and letters;  
Direct pointing to the mind of man;  
Seeing into one's nature and the attainment of  
Buddhahood”.

In the light of the foregoing brief study, it is clear that the essence of both Theravada and Zen - as it of necessity should be - lie in the enlightenment of the mind, or ultimate liberation of man, from the fetters that bind him to the world.

But, for a better understanding of Zen, we have to go back to the early period of Buddhist history, when the Buddha Himself was alive. In the early days of Buddhism, when the Master was alive, His exalted and exemplary personality was not regarded as independent of His teaching. The disciples did not distinguish between the person of their teacher and his teaching, for the Dhamma was realized by the Master, and the Master's personality was a living embodiment of the Dhamma. Once, the Buddha Himself did say to Venerable Vakkali: "He who sees the Dhamma, sees me; and he who sees me, sees the Dhamma". As such, we see that the Buddha was the living embodiment of all that was implied in His doctrine. In Him, the Dhamma was manifest in all its aspects. In short, what constituted the life and spirit of Buddhism was nothing than the very life and spirit of the Buddha himself.

But with the passage of time, when the Order grew rapidly and more and more members joined in, the Sangha became unwieldy. Relationship with the outside world from which the monk had already cut himself off, also became more frequent. The monks began to forget why they had renounced and what the immediate aim in leading a monastic life was. They began to fall short of their ideal – the attainment of Bodhi. With the result, the monks did things which were not in keeping with their higher life. The living presence of the Master which was hitherto the sole guide, was no longer sufficient to keep them away from improper practices which were not conducive to the monastic way of life. This necessitated the formulation of Vinaya rules and deliverance of discourses, as time and occasion, demanded. On one occasion, when Venerable **Mahā Kassapa**, asked the Buddha as to why formerly there were less precepts and more Arahants and why now there were more precepts and less Arahants, the Buddha replied: "It is so, Kassapa, when people become degenerate and the good teaching disappears, there are more precepts and less bhikkhus attain arahantship".

However, at least during the first twenty years of the Master's missionary life, there were no special rules and regulations. The noble example set by the Master alone guided the monks in their chosen path. The monks who had cut themselves off from worldly ties, has as their one and only aim, the destruction of all **Āsavas** (defilements); the attainment of Nirvana. Free from all cares, the early Buddhist monks sought on the four basic sustenances and devoted their entire time to meditation in seclusion. Hence, they needed no supplementary rules or books to put them on the correct path. They were always conscious of their immediate goal set before them – that of Deliverance. Everything, other than persevering for the goal, was secondary. Desiring nothing, well contented, and living in solitude, they practiced meditation strenuously and earnestly till they reached the goal.

It is this early spirit of Buddhism, that Zen, later tries to recapture. Hence, the claim, that they are transmitting the essence of Buddhism, is based on their belief, that Zen takes hold of the enlivening spirit of Buddhism stripped of all its historical and doctrinal appendages.

The mission of Zen, as already remarked, has been to revive the original spirit of Buddhism. Thus Zen insists on '*no dependence upon words and letters*'. Since the final goal is beyond concepts, this is true by whatever path one travels – whether it be Zen or Theravada.

But in Zen, "*non dependence on words and letters*", as is often misunderstood by the Theravadins, is by no means or should by no means, be interpreted as "*uselessness of words and letters*". "No dependence on words and letters", in Zen, merely means, refusal to regard the words of the scriptures as final authority. This is nothing foreign to Theravada. Has not the Buddha, in the **Kālāma Sutta** said: "Do not accept anything on mere hearsay. Do not accept

anything just because it accords with your scriptures. Do not accept anything thinking that the ascetic respected by us". Although, the Zen school does not resort to the words of the scriptures or the teachings derived therefrom as the final authority, yet, it does not necessarily refuse to use the scriptures in time of need, instead of being pulled and hauled by them. Zen teaches that we should not be dominated by the scriptures, nor should we adhere to the literal interpretation, but, should apply their teaching to our daily life.

The attainment of Bodhi could not be the accumulation of dialectical subtleties. Zen, therefore, lays stress in "experience acquirement" rather than the words and letters of suttas. It appeals to facts of personal experience and not to book knowledge. And this is the position taken up by Zen, as regards, what it considers, the attainment of final reality. Zen, thus claims in this respect, to faithfully follow the injunctions of the Master. For, though, the suttas may be helpful, as the Buddha says, they are in themselves part of the raft which must be thrown away in the end. On the other hand, even if person were to cling to the suttas, recite them daily, and act not accordingly nor practice meditation, he is like a cowherd who counts other's kine; he has no share in the blessings of a recluse (Dhammapada). Yet, it has to be admitted, that in Theravada countries, scholasticism has paved the way for more emphasis to be laid on the letter than the spirit, while, in Zen, it is on *zazen* or mediation that all emphasis is laid, as it rightly should be.

With emphasis on the spirit more than the letter, Zen points directly to the human mind, and enables man to see his true nature, so that, he may attain Buddhahood. Zen, theoretically holds to the doctrine that one's heart is Buddha (*sokushin soku butsu*), and believes that every being is intrinsically endowed with Buddha nature. In support of this claim, Zen quotes the *Nehan-gyo* (Nirvana sutra) which reads: "All beings have the Buddha nature". Dogen interprets that as, "all beings are the Buddha nature", emphasizing



thereby, that the Buddha nature is the basis of all existence and the source of all values. In fact, the watch-word of Zen has grown to be, “*see into thy own nature and be a Buddha*”. In short, Zen teaches that, all of us have in our trueselves, the potentiality of becoming the Buddha and that *Buddhata* is nothing but our essence.

Here, we see a divergence in the Theravada viewpoint. There is no doubt, that Theravada too, teaches everyone could become a Buddha. In fact, the Buddha does not claim the sole monopoly to Buddhahood, but encourages others who aspire to become Buddhas. Everyone of us has a grain of the Buddha spirit within us. But, this grain will not and cannot come to full bloom by mere wishful thinking. We should take the necessary steps to cultivate that spirit until, it is brought to perfection and crowned with Buddhahood. However, it is not an easy task to become a Buddha, as Zen would teach or like us to believe. Some of the qualities of the Buddha, as given in the Pali texts are that, He is, “Omniscient”, “Endowed with virtue and knowledge”, “Knower of the worlds”, “A guide incomparable for the training of individuals”, “Teacher of gods and men”, “Possessed of the greatest compassion” and “Endowed with the highest wisdom”. He is one, who is free from all passions and defilements. He is one who is able to understand fully all the aspects of life’s various problems, and also matters relating to, before and after death, and show others, the way to find solutions to their problems. Such an Exalted Person is the Buddha.

To attain this exalted state, Theravada Buddhism teaches that the aspirant (*Bodhisatva*) must practice the ten **pāramis** for incalculable aeons, until he perfects in all of them and qualifies himself for the great task. But, due to the immense and inconceivable difficulties of attaining Buddhahood, there appears a Buddha, in the world but once in a myriad years.

To embody Buddhahood in oneself, Zen teaches *Zazen*. *Zazen* is meditation. This idea of practicing meditation to attain enlightenment, is common to both Theravada and Zen. But, to intensify the original idea and apply it extensively, each school seems to have introduced detailed items of contemplation.

Before one practices meditation, one has to discipline oneself. In Theravada, as we saw earlier, **Sīla** is the first step on the path of Deliverance. This highly ethical code is so classified to suit the needs of the laymen, the novice and the full fledged bhikkhu. By **Sīla**, one's conduct is regulated, by **Samādhi** quietude is attained, and by **Paññā** real understanding takes place.

In Zen, there is no such highly developed ethical code nor do they adhere to the strict Vinaya as followed by the Theravadins. However, in Zen, the community life in monasteries do not permit the monk to devote all his time in meditation. Everyone has to fulfil his part of the duties such as cooking, farming, and cleaning. These duties are called *Samu* and were formulated to cover collective living. They were considered very important from the Zen standpoint. Hence, we have sayings such as those of Hyakujo Zenji: "If I do not work one day, I shall not eat that day". In addition to these duties, which were considered as good as *zazen*, there were Zen regulations of Hyakujo Zenji known by the name of Ch'ing Kuei (*Shingi*). Taken all in all, in a Zen monastery, life at the *Sodo* is one of labour, service, humility, prayer and meditation. As such, judging from the ethical point of view, Zen may be called a discipline aimed at moulding the character. In Zen, the variety of personalities and the individual characters of the Zen masters have resulted in differences, as regards to their instructions and training methods. Yet it may appear to one versed in Theravada Vinaya, that in Zen, the monks do not get the same training as their counterparts would in Theravada countries.



Although from the point of view of **Sāla**, Zen may seem so different from Theravada, both Zen and Theravada emphasize on **Paññā** as the crowning factor. The fundamental of Zen doctrine is to gain true wisdom and tread upon the right path in accordance with it. Wisdom and practice in Zen are compared to “eye and foot”; they are spoken of as “the eye of wisdom and the foot of practice”. Both are regarded as inseparable like the two wheels of a cart, or the wings of a bird. Both Zen and Theravada agree, that we are, what we are, due to **Avidyā** or ignorance. The fundamental doctrine of Buddhism is that all human misery proceeds from **avidyā**. The root cause of all suffering is man’s voluntary blindness to his own inner light and to the perpetual frustration, which, is the consequence of that ignorance. But the shackles of the body and its earthly limitations can be thrown off, and man’s mind can be attuned to Reality, after which intuitive knowledge and a new vision of life are gained. It is the ultimate act of psychic transcendence by which, the mind is able to uncover the veil of illusion between us and reality.

The ultimate standpoint of Zen therefore, is that we have been led astray through ignorance to find a split in our own being; that from the very beginning, there was no need for a struggle between the finite and the infinite, and that the peace we are seeking so eagerly after, has been there all the time. Theravada agrees with Zen in this respect, that the sublime Dhamma is nothing apart from oneself. Says the Buddha: “In this very fathom long body do I proclaim sorrow, the origin of sorrow, the cessation of sorrow, and the path leading to the cessation of sorrow”. The Dhamma is purely dependent on oneself and is to be realized by oneself. Thus, in the **Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta**, we find the exhortation: “Abide in thyself as an island, as a refuge. Seek not for external refuge”. The quest for mental tranquility must of necessity begin with self-examination. In the **Samyutta Nikāya**, dealing with mental tranquility, we have the Buddha posing the question: “Where shall

we look for it?” and replies, “*within you*”. Here, in two words, is the key to the problem which the Buddha proclaimed some 2500 years ago, and which Zen tries to revive.

The goal of Zen is Satori and that of Theravada, **Nibbāna**. While Theravada and most other schools of Buddhism distinguish so many steps of spiritual development before the final attainment, and insist on one’s going through the grade successively, in order to reach the consummate of Buddhist discipline, Zen ignores all these and boldly declare, that when one sees in the innermost nature of one’s own being, one instantly becomes a Buddha, and that there is no necessity of climbing up each rung of perfection, through eternal cycles of transmigration.

As to the opening of Satori all that Zen does, is to indicate and leave the rest, all to one’s own experience – that is to say, following up the indication and arriving at the goal. Here is, where Zen claims, that it is so personal and subjective. This is in other words nothing but the Buddha’s injunction of “**Tumhehi kiccaṃ ātappaṃ akkhātāro tathāgatā** – You yourselves should make the exertion. The Buddhas are only teachers”.

Just as, Theravada teaches that the Dhamma is to be attained by the wise each for himself (**paccattaṃ veditabbo viññūhi**), so does, Zen say that Satori must be directly and personally experienced by each one of us in his inner spirit. By personal experience, Zen means that the disciples should get at the facts at first hand, and not through any intermediary. Its favorite analogy is, that to point to the moon a finger is needed, but woe be unto those who take the finger for the moon. Zen abhors anything and everything coming between ourselves and the fact. It stresses the absolute and positive freedom for which it is they claim necessary, literally to “*kill the Buddha*” because, if we are attached

to and accordingly bound even by Buddha, we cannot achieve positive and absolute autonomy.

Zen is a matter of character and not of the intellect, which means that Zen grows out of the will as the first principle of life. Just as arahatship is not a matter of scholarship, a brilliant intellect may fail to unravel the mysteries of Zen. Had arahatship, just been a matter of scholarship Venerable **Ānanda**, the Buddha's personal attendant who was also the **dharmabhāṇḍāgārika** (treasurer of the Dhamma) with his erudition, would have attained arahatship must earlier than he actually did. Satori, like Arahatsip is something realized in the twinkling of the eye, after a long arduous application to the matter. As such, we come across stories in Zen, where the Zen master gives a particular admonition to a particular pupil, at a particular and critical moment in the latter's spiritual development, which brings Satori to the pupil concerned. To cite, an example from Theravada, we have the conversion of Venerable Sariputta. It is said, that on hearing a four lined stanza, there arose in the mind of Venerable Sariputta, a clear and distinct perception of the Dhamma. Venerable Sariputta attained the deathless and sorrowless state. This stanza which is also noted for having brought about Venerable Moggallana's conversion too, has really nothing miraculous and wonderful, strong enough to produce such a great result. The reason for this sudden realization must be sought, not so much in the formal truth contained in the stanza or in the words of the Zen masters, but in the subjective condition of those, whose ears it chances to fall and in whom it awakes a new vision.

In Theravada, we have the story of Venerable **Ānanda**, who after the Master's demise, persevered and strived hard to attain **Nibbāna**. He failed. Fatigued and tired after intense meditation, he made up his mind to rest a while. He, for the moment, forgot about **Nibbāna**, stopped striving, and was about to lie down when it is said, that he attained it. The same is said of Satori. When

you are thinking of Satori and try to realize it, the more you struggle the further it is away from you. One cannot help pursuing it, but as long as a special effort is made, it is said, Satori cannot be gained. That does not mean to say Satori could be forgotten about altogether. If one expects it to come of its own accord, then too, no one will attain it. The truth of Zen, cannot be attained, unless it is attained with the full force of one's personality. Once this is done, the "third eye" opens and Satori is attained. Says Dr. Zuzuki: "Satori is no particular experience, like other experiences of our daily life. Particular experiences, are experiences of particular events, while the satori experience is the one that runs through all experiences. It can never be separated from our daily life, it is forever there, inevitably there. Satori must take place while consciousness is going through stages or instant points of becoming. Satori is realized along with the becoming, which knows no stoppage. Satori is no other than the intuitive taking hold of reality. There is no reality besides becoming, becoming is reality and reality is becoming. Therefore the Satori intuition of reality consists in identifying oneself with becoming, to take becoming as it goes on becoming". When one attains Satori, the mental revolution is so complete that the attainer sees a new set of values. With Satori, one understands, all things and is at peace with the world and oneself. But this Satori is not something that can be singled out and proclaimed: "Here is my Satori", nor is it, something one can hold of, and say to others: "See it is here".

In the case of Theravada, the goal is Nirvana. Those who attain **Nibbāna** get rid of their individuality and reach the light of a new spiritual day. They are liberated even while alive. The calm serenity and peace with which they face life, the felt conquest of fear and the abounding love for all that is alive, are the prominent features of their lives. They feel themselves to be one with universal life.



Superficially, though the description of one who has attained Satori and **Nibbāna** may seem similar, yet, however, the attributes, belonging to one who has attained **Nibbāna** is never heard of, one mentioned of the person who has attained Satori in Zen. For instance, one who has attained **Nibbāna**, is said to be a person who has eradicated the three roots of evil, got rid of the five **nīvarṇas** (Hindrances), who has no craving or attachment to the five **skandas** (Aggregates) who has cut himself away from the ten **sanyojanas** (fetters), who is pure in deed, word and thought, who is free from the lust of sense pleasures; in short one who has won emancipation from all evil dispositions.

Before concluding, I would like to touch on one more point. According to the Zen tradition, the real condition of the great enlightenment are handed down in the form of personal experience from master to pupil. One of the axioms of Zen, is to succeed and transmit the true law of the Buddha and the patriarchs through “*mind to mind*” and through personality to personality. Zen teaches that, correctly transmitted, Buddhism means the spirit of Gautama Buddha.

Buddha, the historic founder, is alive in the personalities of the successive patriarchs and masters. It is the direct succession from master to pupil (*menju shiho*). In this direct succession (*menju*), the personalities of master and disciple are fused into one, the spirit being handed from one person to the other without interruption. This transmission is not based on historical studies, but stands firmly on deep faith. The life of the Tathagata, Zen believes, is preserved intact, only, when there is an uninterrupted union of personalities between Gautama Buddha and the unbroken line of patriarchs. This transmission, is likened to the pouring of water from one vessel to another, in that the true spirit of the Buddha is passed to the patriarch with neither increase nor decrease.

In Theravada, there is no such transmission spoken of as from "mind to mind". But if by "transmission from mind to mind", is meant that the master first gains his experience and then the pupil following his example, also gains the same goal, then it may be said, that there lies no difference in Theravada and Zen regarding transmission.

It is true, that the pupil is enlightened by the Master, but he experiences Enlightenment through his own effort and vigour. It is Enlightenment that both experience. However, the personal characteristics being different, although the attainment cannot be the same, their essential qualities must be the same. This may be called transmission from mind to mind, but there is nothing substantial to be handed over or to be received.

As we have seen, Zen has its own way of interpreting the spirit of the Buddha. We may conclude therefore that Zen, in spite of its many contradictions, and the uncouthness, and extraordinariness of its outward features, belongs to the general system of Buddhism. It is about the only school of thought of Japanese Buddhism that has a great similarity to Theravada. In Japan, it has stimulated unique cultural growth which may be aptly termed Zen culture. It is deep and thorough study of Zen, that will help to drive away the misapprehensions of the Theravadin, regarding Zen, and bring about a better understanding between the two schools of thought.



**M**OST OF THE GREAT religions and philosophies specially those that originated in India have stressed the importance of mind development, but none so much as Buddhism, where it is regarded not merely as the principal occupation of the more advanced and enlightened students, but as an integral part of the daily life of, even the humblest follower of the Buddha. For it is only, in a fully developed and purified mind that the fires of anger, lust and ignorance, can be extinguished and suffering brought to an end. In fact, the birth of Buddhism was a direct result of the Enlightenment of the Buddha. This enlightenment (**Sammā-sambodhi**) was in turn a direct result of meditation. It is a well known fact, that having renounced the world, Gautama Siddhartha made a strenuous effort for six long years, as an earnest seeker after the Truth to solve the riddle of life and death. He sat at the feet of the most renowned teachers of his day, but failed to attain the knowledge he sought for. At last unaided and unguided, but solely relying on his own efforts, he sat under the Bodhi tree at Gaya with the firm resolve not to stir from his seat, even if his skin, bones, sinews and blood withered and dried away until he attained his goal. With his mind, calm and composed, he said in meditation, and having seen things in their proper perspective or as they truly are (**yathābhuta**), he was able to uncover the thick veil of Ignorance and attain supreme Enlightenment.

After Enlightenment, during his missionary career of 45 years, the Buddha stressed on meditation, as the way to deliverance.

In the **Sutta Piṭaka**, the Buddha says: “This is the only way monks to explain existence, to overcome sadness and grievance, to put an end to death and misery, to find the right path, to realize **Nibbāna** – it is correct meditation. Everything points to this and this alone”. In another sutta of the Pali canon the Buddha says: “Without knowledge there is no meditation, without meditation there is no knowledge, and he who hath both knowledge and meditation is near to Reality”.

As such, we see that meditational practices constitute the very core of the Buddhist approach to life. Meditation is, so to say, the very heart-beat of Buddhism.

Here, I have made an attempt to make a comparative but, brief study of meditation as practiced by the Theravada or the early school of Buddhism and the Zen school, a later development. Before delving into the subject of meditation as practiced in both Theravada and Zen, it is necessary to understand certain fundamental and essential ideas common to, and found in every Buddhist school of thought, whether it be Theravada or Mahayana.

Buddhism does not impose any dogmatic belief upon its adherents. The Buddhist is asked to believe that which he himself has proved to be true. In the **Kālāma Sutta** we are asked not to believe in anything even merely because the Buddha happened to preach it. Buddhism emphasizes that the realization of truth is incomparable, more important than belief in truth. Faith in Buddhism follows the dictates of reason. But faith alone is not enough. If truth is to be realized, there must be right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right endeavour, right mindfulness and right meditation. The Buddhist must be his own guide, for the light is within him, “Be ye lamps unto yourselves, seek refuge in yourself. Betake to no external refuge”. (**Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta**).

The true Buddhist is a free thinker, a seeker of the truth, who seeks to disarm the one enemy – Ignorance. He is self dependent. His own free intelligence must lead him towards supreme knowledge and insight which is the fruit of meditation. For, it is only through meditation that the Dhamma is understood and realized. In his quest for supreme wisdom, the Buddhist will be guided by reason and knowledge rather than sentiment or emotion. He must unravel the web of ignorance by holding fast to that, which he has already proved to be true and continue his search for reality. In this search for reality, meditation will increase the capacity of his intellect and hasten his spiritual evolution. It is a well disciplined mind and meditation that helps the disciple to obtain purification and deliverance. Having made these preliminary remarks, now let us see how the two schools, namely, Theravada and Zen practice meditation with the common object of attaining deliverance.

The aim of Buddhism is deliverance from suffering which characterizes all phenomenal existence. With this end in view, a very definite method of physical and mental training has been elaborated. The scriptures, of the Theravadins, are replete with reference to meditation. However, the most important simple text is the **Satipatṭhāna Sutta** which deals with :-

1. Mindfulness as to body such as breathing, 4 postures, 32 parts of the body etc.
2. Mindfulness as to sensations.
3. Mindfulness as to mind.
4. Mindfulness as to Dhammas such as the five Hindrances (**Pañca Nīrvana**), Five Skandhas (**Pancakkhanda**), Four Noble Truths (**Ariya-sacca**) etc.

In the post-canonical literature of the Theravadins, three works stand out as special treatises on meditation, but the most important is the **Vissuddhimagga** of Buddhaghosa. The

**Satipatthana Sutta** together with the **Vissuddhimagga** form the chief sources, to which the Theravadins turn to, as guides to meditation.

Two essential pre-requisites needed to be observed by the disciples, who set out to practice meditation are, physical ease and self purification. The Theravada school insists that right living is absolutely necessary for the practice of right meditation. The disciple must always and ever sustain himself by the practice of **sīla** or morality, for the proper control of the senses, facilitates mind control and vice versa. In fact, both must be cultivated simultaneously. The other preparatory factors to be taken in account are, time, cleanliness, place and posture. The correct and most common posture is to sit crosslegged, because this position is firm and easy for breathing. Having seated crosslegged, the body is kept upright so as to bring the vertebrae from beginning to end into a straight line. This helps the skin, muscles and sinews not to be cramped. His mind can therefore become one-pointed and he is in a position to commence his meditational practices.

In the Pali Canon of the Theravadins, meditation is called **Bhāvanā**. **Bhāvanā** means “that which produces, that which increases”. Of **Bhāvanā**, which implies systematic training of the mind, there are two stages, namely **Samatha Bhāvanā** and **Vipassana Bhāvanā**. In the former, the meditator attains mental fixity or one-pointedness (**ekaggatā**), is unaffected by the stimuli born of sensuous objects and enjoys internal quiescence. In the latter, that is **Vipassanā Bhāvanā**, the disciple attains intuitive vision of reality. It is by these two methods that one arrives at Right understanding (**Sammā Ditṭhi**), and Right thought (**Sammā Sankappa**). But it is **Vipassanā Bhāvanā**, that is “real” Buddhist meditation, for in such a state of meditation, things are seen as they are in reality.



Included in **Samatha Bhāvanā** is a system of mind training which the disciple must practice to obtain concentration. The disciple should begin by training himself to observe attentively, all that is going on around him, the working of his body and mind, and try to find out the motive and impact of every act of his. This mental preparation calms the mind and helps to banish temporarily the hindrances to meditation and obtain real concentration. In its simplest form, concentration is a narrowing of the field of attention, whereby the mind is made not to waver or scatter itself, but be steady.

For without a certain degree of one pointedness, no mental achievement of any kind can take place. Each mental act, strictly speaking, lasts for one moment only, and it is concentration, that provides some stability in this perpetual flux by enabling the mind to stand in on the same object without distraction. Right concentration, in its widest sense, is that kind of mental concentration accompanied by:-

Right thoughts (**Sammā Sankappa**)

Right effort (**Sammā Vāyāma**)

Right attentiveness (**Sammā Sati**)

Although there is no clear cut dividing line between the habits and methods of concentration and meditation, yet, the Theravada School makes the two so distinct, that it is well to bear the essential differences in mind. In the former, the disciple is consciously controlling his mind and is aware of every mental effort. In the latter, he no more thinks of the mechanics of concentration, than a skilful driver thinks of the manifold processes, which when learning to drive, he found so hard to control. Again, whereas concentration is a process of mental gymnastics useful in daily life, but having in itself no normal or spiritual significance, meditation produces a state of consciousness in which, the spiritual point of view is alone of importance.



Where the student has acquired the habit of keen attentiveness and concentration, it is necessary to make a study of the subject of meditation (**Kammaṭṭhāna**), and choose a subject suitable to his character. In the Theravada School, characters are divided into 6 classes, according to the predominant tendency of each. They are 1. Lustful, 2. Choleric, 3. Ignorant, 4. Incredulous, 5. Credulous, 6. Wise. The choice of the subject for meditation will be determined by the character of each person. The disciple should know whether, anger, greed or avarice dominates his nature, and choose the subject that is contrary to the demeritorious tendencies of his character. For instance, if one is quick tempered, to subdue his anger, he should meditate upon either peace, goodwill or unselfish love. There are however, certain subjects of meditation that can be practiced by all students, for they are the antidotes, so to say, of qualities which are present in almost everyone. The four **Brahmavihāra** are suitable for nearly every temperament. In the Theravada school, the disciple is taught not to fight against the undesirable states of mind, for this only strengthens the thought by concentrating the mind, upon it. Instead, the undesirable thought is to be ignored, attention withdrawn from it, and concentration focused upon the opposite quality. The subject of meditation must also be one that interest the disciple prodigiously, for an interesting subject will help easy concentration and absorption. The **Visuddhimagga** gives a list of 40 subjects from which the disciple makes his choice.

These 40 subjects of meditation or **Kammaṭṭhāna** are classified under 7 sub-divisions, as 10 devices (**Kasina**), 10 Repulsive things, 10 Recollections, 4 **Brahmavihāra**, 4 Formless states, Perception and Analysis making a total of 40.

Included in the 10 devices are the 4 elements, and colours such as yellow, red and white. The Repulsive things deal with corpses in the various stages of decomposition. The Recollections

deal with such subjects, as Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha, and Death. These 40 subjects, are intended to subdue attachment to the senses, and to lead the disciple to the acquisition of true wisdom, by the development of the higher faculties. The whole series, is really summed up in the Four Fundamentals of Attentiveness, to wit, Body, Sensation, Mind and Dhamma. It would, however, be a mistake to assume that the 40 **Kammaṭṭhāna** by themselves exhaust the whole range of Buddhist meditation. Having chosen the suitable subject, the disciple starts his meditation and gradually his intuitive thinking will start functioning. A sense of joy and of well being is then experienced by the disciple, for he knows that he is approaching the plane of pure thought. When adequate progress has been made, there is no longer dependence upon external objects in arriving at mental concentration and mediation becomes wholly subjective. The meditator and the subject of meditation become identified. Superior and subtler states of consciousness are gained in this way. Then the mind having become thoroughly purified and disciplined, and all sensuousness being transcended, there dawn the 4 ecstatic states, which Theravada calls, the Four **Jhānas**. These four **Jhānas** correspond to four stages progressively reached, as a result of success in the practice of **Samādhi Bhāvana**. These **Jhānas** are the fruits of pure life and of pure meditation. In the fourth or highest state, one experiences, transcendental bliss and complete tranquility of body and mind. In that condition one is able to exercise the five **Abhiññās** or psychic powers. The disciple, who desires to develop meditation further than this, should meditate upon formless or purely mental objects. These are called **Arupāvacara**. Having reached the fourth **Jhāna**, the disciple should turn his mind towards **Vipassanā Bhāvana** or Intuitive mediation. Thereby, he will come to understand intuitively the 3 characteristics of conditioned existence, which are transitoriness, sorrowfulness and voidness (**Anicca, Dukkha** and **Anatma**) of all phenomenally existing things constituting the cosmos. He should, then proceed to cultivate the 35 Principles of Knowledge known

as **Bodhi Pakkhiya Dhamma**. By success in this practice, his mind becomes freed from every attachment to samasari existence and happiness of **Nibbāna** is won. This alone, is the goal of meditation in the Theravada school. The result of such meditation is stated, quite clearly, in the verses of the **Theragāthā** and **Therīgāthā** by which the monks and nuns of old, testified to their attainment of gnosis (**anna**).

Having thus considered the Theravada practice, let us now turn our minds to the Zen school. Zen Buddhism is characterized by two unique features which sharply differentiate it from the other schools of Buddhism. The first is its tenets in regard to enlightenment. Zen Buddhism maintains that the highest enlightenment is common to all possessors of this enlightenment and does not differ from that, of Sakyamuni Buddha himself. The second unique feature of Zen Buddhism is, its system of training which, has this enlightenment as its goal. As the word Zen itself shows, this school lays great emphasis upon meditation. The word Zen is a corruption of the Chinese Ch'an which comes from the Sanskrit **Dhyāna**, the Pali equivalent of which is **Jhāna**.

The Chinese canon contains about 20 special treatises on meditation. But in the case of the Zen school, although, it has "no dependence upon words and letters", and is, "a special transmission outside the scriptures", the **Lankāvatara Sutra** has a special relation to it. It was principally due to Bodhidharma, father of Zen in China, that the Sutra came to prominently taken notice of.

The reason why the **Lankāvatara Sutra** is considered to be so closely connected to the Zen school, is based on the fact that here is most emphatically asserted the importance of an inner realization, as the source of all religious virtues and blessings. If the Buddhist life is to be regarded as consisting of **Karuna** and **Prajna**, Zen indeed makes most of the Prajna element, at least during its,

first stages of training, and this Prajna is to be attained by transcending the relativity of wordly knowledge which will free our desires and passions from the entanglements of the individualistic world conception. It does not teach to destroy all the impulses, instincts, and affective factors that makes up the human mind; it only teaches to clear up our intellectual insight from erroneous discriminations and unjustifiable assertions, for when this is done, the mind knows by itself how to work out its native virtues. Zen meditation may be considered under the headings, Zazen and Samu, the Koan and Mondo, and Satori. Before discussing these, I would like to make a few observations about the preliminaries of Zen mediation. As to posture, the directions are to be comfortable, but up-right with head, neck and spine in a straight line. The Zen monk puts a small round cushion under his hip to raise himself a little. A good deal of emphasis is laid on good posture in preventing mind wandering and sleep. Hakuin, the great Zen master, considered to be the father of the modern *Rinzai* Zen School, thinks it important to swell out the lower abdomen and protrude it forward during meditation. At the beginning, the Zen monk is asked to breathe deeply a few times and meditate, so that the vital energy which comes in with the breath goes down and fills the abdomen below the navel. In this way, they harmonize the whole nervous system and invigorate, body and mind.

Zen beginners are first taught to count the breaths. "First try to come near to Samadhi by counting the breaths", says Rinzai Master Shaku Soyen. "To attempt to go into a Zen Koan without first tranquillizing and refining the mind would be like going after the fish with a hammer or looking for birds in a thunderstorm". This mental application is called by the Zen School as *Sho-nen* and deep meditation practice is called *Sho-zen* (right meditation). Zen Buddhists are supposed to practice both of them, but *Rinzai* stresses *Sho-nen* whereas the Soto school stresses Samatha power. Zazen, literally Zen – sitting, the name given to the sedentary aspect



of Zen meditation, is done in Zen monasteries with all monks sitting together in the mediation hall. There are definite intervals for rest and exercise, and each monk periodically visits the master to report his progress, if any, and perhaps to receive a new subject for meditation. In these interviews, words are used but sparingly; as the whole aim of the meditator is to rise above the intellect, the master must needs have the power of perceiving by the merest glance or gesture, whether the pupil has grasped the meaning of the koan given him. No understanding Zazen however is complete without appreciating that it forms but part of the daily round of work. The motto of Zen monasteries is, 'No work no food'. Such insistence on manual work or Samu as part of the day's routine, is very important, and is meant to keep the body as fit as the mind, to prevent laziness and idle introspection, and keep alive the ideal of applying at once, the principles of truth in meditation.

Next we come to the Ko-an and Mondo. These are really the subjects of mediation. From the twelfth century onwards, the masters of the Rinzai School of Zen in China, and later those in Japan, employed a method of instruction by question and answer which is known as 'Koan observation', or Koan study. A koan is sometimes a word, phrase or saying, which has certain qualities, the most important being, that it defies intellectual analysis and thereby enables the user to burst the fetters of conceptual thought. Once, the Zen monk receives a koan from the Zen master, he keeps on meditating on the given koan and visits the Master periodically to answer the koan. This practice in the Zen school is known as *Sanzen*. Generally the most common koans that are given to beginners are either "Mu", or "*Sekishu onju*" (what is the sound of a single hand), or "what was your original face before your parents were born?" Of about 1700 koans, only about 100 or 200 are now generally used.



The idea of giving these koans, is to reproduce in the mind of the pupil the state of consciousness of which, these statements are the expression. Says Dr. Suzuki "All koans are the utterances of satori with no intellectual meditation. What the koan proposes to do is to develop artificially or systematically in the consciousness of Zen followers what the early masters produced in themselves spontaneously". A koan has no answer. Its purpose is therefore to work up an ever-increasing pressure of "searching and contriving", which leads in time to a state of intellectual bankruptcy. When the process of thought can go no further, the student must summon courage to abandon all, and find in the death of thought, the birth of enlightenment. According to the Zen School, so long as one clings to the intellect, the world of enlightenment will remain closed. In the use of a koan, the process is thus three fold. First, the mind is concentrated on the koan, until the intellect is utterly exhausted, as it were burnt out. Then, comes a pause, a suspension of all function a nameless emptiness, a severance of every tie, a letting go. Finally comes the 'answer', a binding flash of understanding, which according to its completeness or partiality, shatters or merely loosens the fetters of conceptual thought. But few achieve this level without an effort which exhausts the personality.

In addition to the koan, is the Mondo, which is a rapid exchange of question and answer between master and pupil. In most of the Mondo used in the Zen school, we will find that the answer of the Master throws the question back into the questioner's mind, where alone a solution may be found. The Mondo cuts off speculation, stills the intellect and calls on a higher faculty. Here it must be mentioned, that Zen masters are equally famous for their unconventional sermons. Says one master: 'If you have a staff, I will give you one, if you have not, I will take it away from you'. Other great masters have preached to their pupils, more briefly still. More than one has entered the pulpit and made but a single

gesture such as opening wide his arms. Yet this was enough to open 'eye of truth' in some and enable them to attain Satori.

Zen teachers recommend everyone to practice meditation for the sake of achieving balance and calm, to increase energy, and strengthen the will. But if a pupil is determined to solve the whole riddle of existence, he has to go much further into meditation, and then the deepest layers will be touched. There are the fundamental unconscious convictions, which bind man to this life of illusion and suffering, and these convictions will appear and bewilder the advanced student, who finds himself assailed by sudden irrational storms of anger or attachment, from which, beginners may seem relatively free. This is technically called, in the Zen school, 'the emergency of demons', and at this point the pupil should have a teacher who will dissolve the "appearances" for him.

The whole purpose of the Koan exercise and Mondo is to attain Satori. Dr. Suzuki defines it as, "an intuitive looking into the nature of things in contradistinction to the analytical or logical understanding of it". Satori is attained by tremendous effort and never by mere passivity. It is the result of the 'spiritual poverty' attained in Zazen. Satori is the goal of the Zen school. Teachers of Zen have a favourite saying: "Return back to your original state". Here "original state" refers to the original state of mind. This state of mind is one free from Avidya. Therefore, when the Zen practitioner has returned to the original state of mind, it means he has attained Satori.

There are many degrees of Satori, ranging from a flash of intuitive understanding to pure Samadhi. Presumably, the different grades of koan collate with the grades or levels of Satori. As ever harder Koans are solved, the unconscious more and more invades the conscious mind. First, the purely personal prejudices are discarded. As the koans gets more difficult and deeper understanding

fills the mind, the claims of humanity begin to predominate until, at the threshold of Samadhi, the individual consciousness is merged in the Universal mind.

In the opinion of Dr. Suzuki, "the opening of Satori is the remaking of life itself". This, then, is the secret of Zen; it uses the mind to surmount the mind, and with the aid of a graduated series of koans, burst through into a state of consciousness, which lies above duality and hence beyond the sway of all comparisons and distinctions. The sole concern of Zen, is to attain enlightenment and all which stands between is made to serve this end or be flung aside. Even the most noble ideas and sentiments, must bow down to this central purpose or be destroyed. Only, such a ruthless integrity of purpose, such a piercing singleness of heart, can explain the words of Rinzai: 'If you encounter the Buddha kill him, if you encounter the Patriarch kill him... kill them all without hesitation for this is the only way to deliverance'.

In the light of the above remarks, it will be clear that there are similarities as well as differences as to the practice of meditation in the Theravada and Zen school. At the very outset, it could be said, that while Theravada has a well graduated course of meditation beginning from mind training to the higher levels of mind development, ultimately leading to Enlightenment, the Zen school is almost a leap upward, abrupt and sudden. It attaches little importance to what is achieved in formal meditation.

In both schools however the preliminaries such as posture and counting of breath before real meditation begins are nearly the same. While in Theravada, a teacher may prove useful to the beginner, but is not an actual necessity, in Zen the teacher is all important, because Zen a transmission 'from mind to mind' of the realization which Buddha gave to Kashyapa, handed down in unbroken line ever since, and the teacher is the pupil's link with

that realization. In Zen, a sincere pupil working by himself can cover much of the path, and then, when he does meet a teacher the transmission of realization will take place quickly. But in Theravada, there is no such transmission. A teacher may help one, but enlightenment takes place, within oneself, through one's own efforts.

As to the subjects of meditation, there is a great difference between the two schools. In Theravada, the subjects of meditation is known as **Kammatthāna** and in Zen it is called Koan.

The difference is not merely in the names used by the two schools but in the actual subject-matter. As mentioned earlier, in Theravada, the **Kammatthāna** may be a colour, an element, a corpse, recollection on Buddha, Death, the Brahmavihara such as **Mettā**, **Muditā**, **Karunā**, **Uppekkhā** or the Five **Skandhas**, but in the Zen school none of these are found. Instead, we have the koans, which are the direct experiences of former Zen masters now hardened into concepts, with the passage of time. Also Zen Buddhists meditate on Bodhidharma and other great teachers of the past, and certain incidents of their lives become subjects of meditation, especially in the Rinzai Sect. In Zen, *Sanzen* is considered to be very important. Here, once the pupil has received a koan from the master, he meditates upon it and when he thinks he has rally grasped the inner meaning of the koan, the pupil enters the teacher's room alone and presents his view. The teacher sharply criticizes the pupil's view. The pupil may return many times, until his understanding finally tallies with the authentic view and the teacher accepts his answer to the Koan. This practice though not commonly found, in the Theravada countries, is traced back to the Buddha's time when, the Buddha personally instructed His pupils and permitted individual interviews to His disciples. However, even if the practice of Sanzen could be traced back to the time of the Buddha, yet, there is this difference. Whenever, the pupil turned up the Buddha gave him the necessary clue to get him on the right



track. Never do we find any mention of the maddening paradoxes, the scorn of the conventional, the fierce impatience with all formulated views and doctrines, and the curious and sometimes violent methods used by masters to assist their pupils to break free, as in Zen. Although in the Zen school, all monks sit together in meditation and, manual labour (Samu) is part and parcel of meditation practices, such collective sitting nor manual labour is considered to be essential from the Theravada point of view. Both schools, however, do agree that meditation must be continuous, but not to the extent of straining the mind and body.

As to the final result of meditation practiced in both schools, however, they may differ in methods and subjects of meditation, the final goal of both Theravada and Zen is Enlightenment.

The various stages of Satori may be compared to the various stages of attainment reached by the Theravadin. In Zen the final meditation is spoken of as 'Great Death' and such like phrases, because the masters are reluctant to speak positively. What the pupil feels he knows – body and mind – are cast off, and as to what may be beyond no words can speak it. Although in Zen, the Masters are reluctant to speak positively of the final state, in Theravada without any fear of contradiction it is called 'Supreme Bliss'.

In conclusion, it could be said that the difference between Theravada and Zen is more than one of names. It shows the basis psychological diversion of two groups looking for salvation – the introverts and the extroverts.







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